

January 4, 2013

Via Hand Delivery to State Capitol Offices

CWIC
Colorado Water
Issues Committee
of the
Texas Rice
Producers
Legislative Group

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East Bernard, TX
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**Appointed
Members:**

Lakeside
Ronald Gertson
(Chair)
Jack Johnson (V-
Chair)

Garwood
Kenneth Danklefs
Billie Heffner

Pierce Ranch
Laurance Armour
III
Joe Crane

Gulf Coast
Haskell Simon
Daniel Berglund

**The Purpose of
CWIC:**

Facilitate the
availability of
Colorado River
water supplies for
rice production in
the four major
irrigation
operations on the
Colorado River.

Chairman Troy Fraser
Chairman Glenn Hegar
Vice Chairman Kirk Watson
Texas Senate
Austin, Texas

Honorable Senators:

This letter, on behalf of the Colorado Water Issues Committee of the Texas Rice Producers Legislative Group (CWIC), requests your leadership in addressing the water needs of the lower Colorado River communities in the historical context of cooperation and in a way that best preserves the vitality of the entire basin. Your help is greatly needed. The drought conditions that continue to plague this basin's water supplies challenge upstream and downstream interests alike. We hope that once again, as in the past, the combined efforts of upstream and downstream leaders will initiate fundamental progress on water security for all.

While there was some hope of improved rainfall conditions last November, those conditions have not materialized and the basin finds itself in a worse condition currently. The Lower Colorado River Authority (LCRA) advises that the continuing decline of stored water supplies combined with significant negative changes to long-range weather forecasts leave the basin's water supplies in a precarious position. It is our understanding that this resulting change in the hydrological outlook has lead LCRA staff to propose a new, more stringent request to the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) regarding lake level triggers for limiting releases of water available to downstream irrigators.

LCRA has important obligations, including under its TCEQ-approved Water Management Plan, to its upstream customers and also to the downstream farming interests who have historically supported and depended on both the Highland Lakes and the irrigation water delivery systems for which LCRA assumed responsibility. CWIC hopes that LCRA's actions in the coming days with regard to seeking emergency changes to its water rights will be an appropriate response to changed conditions and not simply a response to heightened local criticism and pressure. As was the case in 2012, we do not seek to stand in the way of

scientifically justifiable actions that may be considered by the LCRA board necessary to protect public health and safety. Neither will we object to the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality granting necessary emergency changes to LCRA's water rights on that basis, despite the fact that such a ruling may well deprive downstream counties of water for a second consecutive year.

Discussions of the consequences of drought in all forums must acknowledge that the lower basin also faces a tangible water emergency. A curtailment of water supply in 2012 and again in 2013 will result in significant economic and social suffering in the three downstream counties. In a rural region of the state where agriculture accounts for 21% of employment and 9.3% of total GDP, the repercussions of back-to-back years without surface irrigation water will be devastating. Claims that groundwater in the area can offset the lost surface water are patently false. Groundwater can support only a small percentage of the 52,000 acres of rice that lay idle in 2012 and at huge capital expense to that small percentage of farmers even capable of securing bank financing.

We are encouraged by LCRA's endeavor to develop off-channel storage reservoirs in the irrigation systems that would enable the utilization of water entering the river below Austin as well as provide for more efficient delivery of stored water. This in turn should relieve considerable pressure from the main storage reservoirs of Travis and Buchanan.

It is our hope that we can work with you and the other stakeholders to help make these new reservoirs a reality as quickly as possible, and at the same time demonstrate to the rest of the country that Texas is serious about taking bold actions to drought proof its water supplies.

CWIC urges you to aid our basin as a whole in responsible and shared development of vital water resources to preserve irrigated agriculture as a necessary, viable and active contributor to our basin's and our state's economies. Irrigated agriculture in the lower Colorado River basin is among the most efficient and productive in the world. Texas rice farmers over the last three decades have been able to triple their productive capacity while using 50% less water. Their record for implementing water conservation practices in downstream farming operations is undeniable, and their efforts in research and development of new seed varieties and irrigation practices continue to this day. We believe that working together, with your leadership and the leadership of the basin's state representatives is the best way to halt the fatal momentum that would destroy irrigated agriculture in the state while offering no solution for sustainable growth.

Thank you for all you do for this basin and the state. We look forward to working with you.

Sincerely,



Ronald B. Gertson, Chair
Colorado Water Issues Committee

January 4, 2013

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CC via email:

Commissioner Todd Staples

Chairman Allan Ritter

Chairman Dennis Bonnen

Chairman Lois Kolkhorst,

Rep. Phil Stephenson

Janice McCoy (for Senator Fraser)

Lisa Craven (for Senator Hegar)

Sarah Howard (for Senator Watson)

c/o Lyn Clancy:

LCRA Chair, Timothy Timmerman

LCRA Committee Chair, Scott Spears

LCRA General Manager, Becky Motal